

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

March 15, 2011

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Washington, DC 20510-6175

Dear Chairman Boxer:

I write today to support a full investigation by the Environment and Public Works Committee into the safety of our nation's nuclear power plants, in light of the ongoing situation in Japan. As you know, two nuclear reactors in Japan at the Fukushima plant are believed to be in partial meltdown according to the Japanese government; in addition, there have been two hydrogen explosions and direct venting of radioactive gases into the environment. Hundreds of thousands of people have been evacuated, and dozens have already tested positive for high radiation levels. Low level radiation has been detected by the United States Navy as far as 100 miles from the plant site. Reliable scientific reports suggest that venting of radioactive gas may continue for not just weeks, but months.

Apparently the Fukushima Number One reactor is of the same design, General Electric Boiling Water Mark One, as 23 plants in the United States including one in my state, Vermont Yankee in Vernon, Vermont. The containment design of this type of plant has been long criticized by federal nuclear safety officials. According to reports, in 1986, the top safety official at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission cited an earlier government study to say that the probability of failure at a Mark One containment plant in an accident scenario was "90%."

I fully support the committee conducting a full investigation to determine what we can learn from the disaster in Japan, and the implications for the United States' nuclear reactors. This should include testimony from independent nuclear experts and scientists as well as top officials from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and this testimony should be taken in formal hearings where members of the Environment and Public Works Committee have the opportunity to ask questions on behalf of their constituents and the American public.

I appreciate your leadership as Chairman, and know you will work diligently and responsibly to ensure a thorough and independent review of the facts.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator